

READING

Part 1

Read the text and complete the tasks that follow. Choose a, b, or c. Put a circle round the most appropriate answer. An example is done for you.

AN AUTUMN GAME

Conkers is a playground game traditionally played in September and October by children in Britain, the Republic of Ireland and some former British colonies using the seeds of horse-chestnut trees. The name conker is also used for the seed and the tree itself. The horse-chestnut tree is not native to Britain, however, but was brought from the Balkans in the late 16th century. It was not widely planted until the early 19th century. Previously, children played with snail shells or hazelnuts.

To prepare for the game, a hole is drilled in a large, hard conker using a nail, gimlet, or small screwdriver. A piece of string, about 25cm long, is threaded through it. Often, a shoelace is used. A large knot at one or both ends of the string secures the conker.

The game is played between two people, each with a conker. They take turns hitting each other's conker using their own. One player lets the conker dangle on the full length of the string while the other player swings their conker in an effort to strike their opponent's. They take turns trying to strike each other's conker until one breaks. When this happens, the player whose conker remains intact gains a point. This may be either the attacking player or (more often) the defending one.

A new conker is a none-er meaning that it has conquered none yet. If a none-er breaks another none-er then it becomes a one-er; if it was a one-er then it becomes a two-er and so on. If the defeated conker had accumulated points from previous wins, the winner takes the points of the defeated conker as well as gaining a point for winning that particular game. For example, if a two-er plays a three-er, the surviving conker will become a six-er.

The hardest conkers usually win. Hardening conkers is often done by keeping them for a year, baking them briefly, soaking or boiling them in vinegar, or painting them with clear nail varnish. Such hardening is however usually regarded as cheating. Another factor effecting the strength of a conker is the shape of the hole; a clean cylindrical hole is stronger, as it has no notches that can begin a crack or split.

In 1965 the World Conker Championships were set up in Ashton, Northamptonshire, England, and still take place on the second Sunday of October every year. In 2014, an audience of 5,600 turned up to watch more than 500 competitors from all over the world.

Example: What is NOT a conker?

- a) a kind of tree
- b) a kind of seed
- c) a snail shell

Total: 6 marks

1. How is the conker kept on the string?
 - a) with a nail
 - b) with a large knot
 - c) with a shoelace
2. The game requires
 - a) two players and a conker.
 - b) two players and two conkers.
 - c) any number of people and a conker.
3. How do you win the game?
 - a) You hit the other conker.
 - b) You break your conker.
 - c) You break the other conker.
4. Winners may earn
 - a) their opponent's conker.
 - b) one point in each game.
 - c) different numbers of points.
5. What is NOT considered cheating?
 - a) soaking the conker in vinegar
 - b) drilling a hole in your conker
 - c) baking the conker
6. What is true of the game of conkers?
 - a) It is still popular today.
 - b) It is costly.
 - c) It is losing its popularity.